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Contact: Meg VanSchoorl (360) 902-2164

Cindy Plummer, Potato Commission (509) 765-8845

Mike Louisell (360) 902-1813

WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

P.O. Box 42560, Olympia, Washington 98504-2560

## **Pacific Northwest growers to benefit from potato marketing grant**

OLYMPIA — A \$50,000 federal grant will fund a project to build ties between Japanese potato chip processors and potato growers in Washington, Oregon and Idaho. The funds will be administered through the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA), which took the lead along with the Washington State Potato Commission (WSPC) in competing for the U.S. Department of Agriculture grant.

"Frozen french fries are the major Pacific Northwest potato product exported to Japan," said Meg VanSchoorl, senior international trade specialist with WSDA. "This project could open a new market for farmers who grow chipping potatoes." Chip potatoes include varieties such as Snowden, Atlantic, Norvalley, Pike and Norchip that could be used for Japan's sizeable potato chip and snack food industry.

VanSchoorl added the three-state partnership will educate Japanese food processors about the technical characteristics and uses of Northwest chipping potatoes. Seminars will be conducted with Japanese manufacturers to demonstrate the value of U.S. chip potatoes with the long-term goal of creating export sales.

"The grant is the first joint marketing effort between Washington, Oregon and Idaho potato commissions," said Cindy Plummer, who directs marketing for the WSPC. These commissions are contributing matching funds and in-kind contributions to boost the Japan chipping export project budget to \$100,000.

Northwest potato interests are working with federal and state officials to seek Japanese government and industry support to open the market there for U.S. chip potatoes. Plummer noted that small-scale farmers would benefit greatly from the opportunity to provide Japan's snack food industry with chipping potatoes, an alternative crop to the already established varieties used for french fries.

"Opening new foreign markets can be a challenging and expensive proposition so it is significant that our region is able to pool its resources to make our grower dollars go further," Plummer said.

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The federal grant comes through USDA's Federal-State Marketing Improvement Program. The request for USDA funds was supported by the state departments of agriculture and potato commissions in the three Pacific Northwest states, as well as by the National Potato Promotion Board.

The federal agency announced in early June that \$645,000 are being awarded for agricultural market research and demonstration projects in 13 states. The grant to Washington state is the fourth such grant it has received through WSDA's International Marketing Program in the last few years.

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